

Helms Tried To Curb FBI On Break-In

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Former CIA Director

Richard M. Helms ordered his deputy, 11 days after the Watergate break-in, to request that the FBI confine its investigation "to personalities already arrested or under suspicion."

The June 28, 1972, memo to Gen. Vernon A. Walters also urged that the FBI be requested to "desist from expanding this investigation into other areas which may, eventually, run afoul of our operations."

The Helms memorandum appears to be in sharp conflict with testimony by the former CIA director to five congressional committees and federal prosecutors investigating the June 17, 1972, break-in and subsequent cover-up conspiracy.

It emerged, in part, in the recently released transcript of a Senate Armed Services Committee executive session dealing with the confirmation of William E. Colby as CIA director.

The thrust of testimony both by Helms and Walters, as well as other principals in the case, has been that despite heavy White House pressure the CIA steadfastly denied that FBI inquiries into Watergate matters would expose CIA activities.

President Nixon, by his own admission and the testimony of top White House aides, initially raised this concern when the FBI was on the verge of investigating the channeling of funds through Mexico which established a link between the

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break-in team and the Nixon re-election committee.

Colby, in a series of written responses to Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), said that Helms' memo to Walters was "consistent with our concern that investigations might reveal CIA activities and our belief that they were unnecessary since CIA had no involvement with the Watergate incident."

This was precisely the concern voiced by top White House officials, during the early days of the Watergate investigation, in urging that FBI investigation of the Watergate "Mexican connection" be suspended.

The White House pressures directed at Helms, Walters and acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III had the effect of delaying the Mexican investigation from June 22 to July 10, when the first FBI interviews were conducted in Mexico City.

CIA officials declined to divulge the full memo or comment on the apparent contradiction between the earlier public testimony by CIA officials and the assertions in the Helms memo to Walters.

Colby, in his written responses to Nunn's questions, said that the gist of the memo on CIA relationships with the FBI in Watergate matters was first stated by Helms at a morning staff meeting of the CIA on June 19—two days after the break-in.

The memo was first alluded to, although without specific identification, by former Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox in his appearance Monday before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Cox said he had received a memorandum by a "major witness" in the Watergate scandal that was at odds with other testimony by that witness. Hearst News Service reporter Patrick J. Sloyan revealed the witness to be Helms in a dispatch Tuesday.

Rep. Lucien N. Nedzi (D-Mich.), chairman of a House Armed Services intelligence subcommittee, acknowledged that he obtained a copy of the full Helms-Walters memo in connection with his 12-week investigation of CIA involvement in Watergate. Nedzi insisted, however, that the requested curtailment of FBI activities was limited to a few CIA operatives whose covers Helms feared might be blown by FBI inquiries in Mexico.

Nedzi declined, however, to divulge the full contents of the memo. So did staff officials of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Nedzi's subcommittee issued a report Tuesday charging that the CIA had been duped by top White House aides into becoming implicated in the Watergate case.

The Senate Watergate committee had the Helms memo in its files, but did not publicly question the former CIA director or any

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other witness about its contents.

Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn.) asked Helms on Aug. 2 at a session of the Watergate committee whether he had ever told Gray that there might be some form of CIA involvement in Watergate.

"I don't recall ever discussing with Gray," Helms testified, "this question of its (the FBI's) uncovering other CIA operations."

Nevertheless Helms did phone Gray on June 28, according to Nedzi's report, and asked that the FBI "not interview" two CIA active agents, Carl Wagner and John Coswell.

Colby told Nunn that a check of the FBI's Watergate leads in Mexico "did not involve any current CIA assets or activities. Having satisfied ourselves that there was no CIA involvement in the Watergate incident, we were concerned that a possible broadening of the investigation which would reveal CIA foreign activities having no bearing on the Watergate incident would take place."

The FBI leads were focused specifically on Nixon re-election funds which were "laundered" through a Mexico City bank from Texas contributors to the safe of the President's 1972 re-election fund raiser, Maurice H. Stans. The money was ultimately traced to the account of convicted Watergate conspirator Bernard Barker.

In the course of the executive hearings Colby also acknowledged that he sought unsuccessfully to conceal from former Watergate prosecutor Earl Silbert at an interview on Nov. 27, 1972, that it was White House domestic affairs adviser John D. Ehrlichman who requested CIA assistance for Howard Hunt Jr. in July, 1971, in connection with the break-in of the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

In a "memorandum for the record" on the interview with Silbert, Colby said he "danced around the room several times for 10 minutes to try to avoid becoming specific on this, finally naming the White House, and was then pinned by Silbert with a demand for the name, at which point the name of the individual was given."

The name was Ehrlichman. Colby recited his efforts to withhold Ehrlichman's name in a White House meeting on Dec. 15, 1972, with Ehrlichman and then White House counsel John W. Dean III in the presence of Helms.

This was some six months after Helms and Walters realized, according to their subsequent testimony, that Ehrlichman and Dean were trying to implicate the CIA in the Watergate case.

Colby said he had hoped to withhold Ehrlichman's name from federal prosecutor Silbert because "there was a reluctance to drop somewhat inflammatory names into the kind of atmosphere that was around us at that time."